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ABSTRACT

This research brief looks at trends and issues in part-time undergraduate enrollment by summarizing the data available and comparing them to data on full-time students. Highlighted findings indicate that from 1970 to 1990 the number of part-time undergraduate students more than doubled and that most of this growth occurred during the 1970s. A profile of part-time students notes that they tend to be older than traditional age college students, that more women than men are part-time students, and that part-time students are most likely to attend public, 2-year institutions. In comparing part-time students to full-time students this review finds that part-time students are more likely to be independent of their parents, and that they are much less likely to receive financial aid than their full-time counterparts. Discussion of this finding points out that this is due in part to federal restrictions on financial aid which distinguish between part-time students who attend less than half time and those who attend more than half time. Included are a special section on part-time students at public 2-year colleges, discussion of implications, 6 end notes, 5 resources, and a 19-item bibliography. (JB)

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Division of Policy Analysis and Research
American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.

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Eileen M. O'Brien

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Division of Policy Analysis and Research
American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.

Part-Time Enrollment: Trends and Issues

Eileen M. O'Brien

As college enrollments rose over the past two decades, the proportion of part-time undergraduate students grew much faster than the proportion of full-time students. For instance, in 1970, 2.1 million students, or 28 percent of the total, attended college on a part-time basis; by 1990, almost 5 million, or 41 percent of all students, were enrolled part time. This trend is projected to continue throughout the 1990s.

This research brief, which limits its analysis to undergraduate part-time students, summarizes the data available on part-time students and then compares them with full-time students. The brief also focuses on part-time students at public two-year colleges, where the majority of part-time undergraduates are concentrated. Finally, it offers recommendations for further research and discusses the implications of the expected continued growth of this student population.

HIGHLIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

- From 1970 to 1990, the number of part-time undergraduate students more than doubled, from 2.1 million to almost 5 million. In comparison, full-time enrollment rose by 34 percent, climbing from 5.3 million in 1970 to 7 million in 1990.
- Most of this growth occurred during the 1970s. By 1980, almost 4.2 million students were enrolled part time, a 95 percent increase from 1970. Yet during the 1980s, the growth slowed, and the number of part-time students increased by 18 percent.
- Two groups have contributed to this increase: the growing numbers of students who work and students older than the traditional college age. In 1991, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of part-time students were employed. In 1990, only one out of four part-time students fell in the "traditional" age range of college students (ages 18 to 24).
- NCES projections indicate that the number of part-time undergraduates will continue to increase. By 1995, an estimated 5.4 million students will enroll part time, accounting for 44 percent of all students. And by the year 2002, 5.7 million, or 42 percent, of the 13.7 million undergraduates are projected to attend part time.
- In 1990, almost three-fifths (59 percent) of part-time undergraduates were women, compared with 52 percent of full-time students.
- In 1990, a sizable proportion of all racial/ethnic groups attended part time, and American Indian and Hispanic students were most likely to enroll part time.
- Part-time undergraduates are less likely to receive financial aid than their full-time counterparts: only 26 percent of part-time undergraduates received any aid, compared with 57 percent of full-time students.
- More research is needed on part-time students, specifically in the areas of persistence and degree completion rates. Some regional and institutional studies have shown that even at community colleges, students are not finishing in two years, so the expected length of financial aid coverage may not be appropriate.
- Continued increases in the part-time student population have important implications for the financial aid system. Some analysts note that the current federal financial aid system was developed for the traditional student —

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meaning a full-time, dependent student falling between the ages of 18 and 24. This causes problems for part-time students, whose "needs" may not be accurately assessed under this system due to the different costs they face. In addition to tuition, fees, and books, part-time students — especially adult students — typically have higher household expenses, child care costs, as well as making up for lost wages.

- The growth in the number of students attending part time raises many questions for higher education institutions: Does the large number of students who work and attend college part time indicate that a college education is moving farther out of reach for many Americans? Why has the number of women and minority students enrolling part time increased? Given the recent policy discussions about linking financial aid and community service, how will part-time students be able to juggle these competing demands? Colleges and universities must try to address these questions, recognizing that this important student population will continue to grow.

A Profile of Part-Time Students

Part-time students are defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education as those who enroll with a total credit load less than 75 percent of the normal full-time credit load. Using this definition, NCES fall enrollment surveys show:

- The number of part-time undergraduate students more than doubled from 2.1 million in 1970 to almost 5 million in 1990.
- In comparison, full-time enrollment rose by 34 percent, climbing from 5.3 million in 1970 to 7 million in 1990 (figure 1).

These figures are probably undercounts. As Ross and Hampton (1992) have shown, the NCES undergraduate enrollment counts, especially for part-time students, are underestimated since they provide only a snapshot of attendance at the beginning of an academic year. The authors note that students enroll on a rolling basis all year long, particularly at community colleges.

- By adjusting NCES data to a full-year count using other NCES sources, Ross and Hampton estimate that a total of 16.8 million undergraduates attended postsecondary institutions in 1990, with 7.1 million students enrolled part time.[1]
- This compares with the NCES 1990 fall enrollment snapshot of 11.9 million students, including 4.9 million part-time students.

For the purposes of this research brief, NCES fall enrollment data were used because they provide the most comprehensive information on demographic characteristics of part-time students.

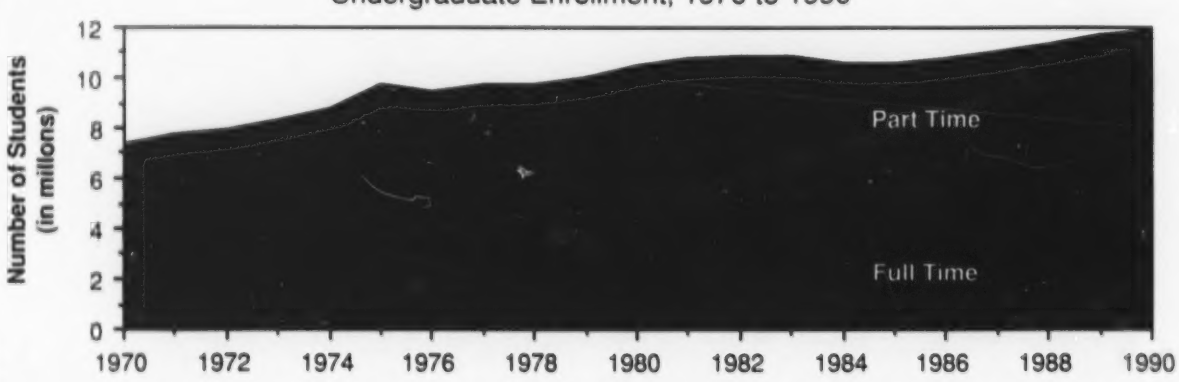
- In 1970, three of every ten (28 percent) undergraduates attended part-time; yet by 1990, more than two out of five (41 percent) did.
- Most of this growth occurred during the 1970s: by 1980, 4.2 million students were enrolled part time — a 95 percent increase from 1970. Yet during the 1980s, the growth slowed, and the number of part-time students increased by 18 percent by 1990.

There is no national survey showing the reasons why students elect to attend part time, but most scholars agree that the growing numbers of students who work and are above the traditional college age contributed to this increase.

- In 1991, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that more than half (53 percent) of all college students aged 16 to 24 were employed (Bureau of

Figure 1

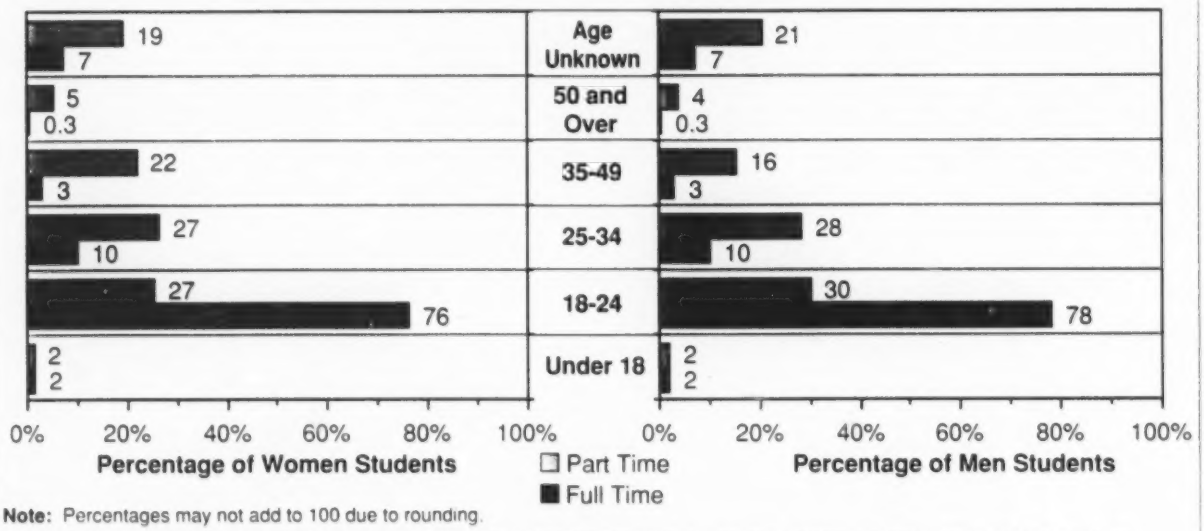
Undergraduate Enrollment, 1970 to 1990



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 1992*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992.

Figure 2

Age of Full-Time and Part-Time Students, by Gender, 1990



Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990, unpublished data tabulations.

Labor Statistics, 1992). Among part-time students, an even higher proportion worked:

— More than two-thirds (68 percent) of part-time students were employed, compared with less than half (47 percent) of full-time students.

- The proportion of working students has increased dramatically since 1981, when 47 percent of college students worked.

Not surprisingly, part-time students tend to be older than the "traditional" age of college students. By the same token, more than half of adult students (age 25 and older) attend college on a part-time basis.

- In 1990, one out of four (27 percent) part-time undergraduates fell in the "traditional" age range of college students (ages 18 to 24). Another 27 percent fell between the ages of 25 to 34, and almost one-fifth (19 percent) were aged 35 to 49. [2]
- NCES data indicate that the age of the part-time student population is increasing: in 1980, 30 percent of part-timers fell in the 18 to 24 range, one-fourth (25 percent) fell in the 25 to 34 range, and 20 percent were in the 35 to 49 range.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

Women are more likely than men to be part-time students.

- In 1990, 44 percent of female students were enrolled part time, contrasted with 38 percent of male college students.
- These proportions changed little from 1980, when 43 percent of women and 36 percent of men attended college part time.
- Also, women students enrolled part time were slightly older than male part-time students (figure 2).

— While 27 percent of female part-time students fell in the 18-24 age range, 30 percent of male part-timers did.

— Male and female part-time undergraduates had relatively the same proportion among the 25 to 34 age group: 28 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

— However, more female part-time students fell in the 35 to 49 age range —22 percent vs. 16 percent for men.

RACIAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

- In 1990, American Indian and Hispanic students were the most likely of all racial/ethnic groups to attend part time, while Asian American and nonresident alien students were the least likely (figure 3). Part-time students represented the following proportions of these groups:

— 47 percent of American Indian students;

— 44 percent of Hispanic students;

— 41 percent of white students;

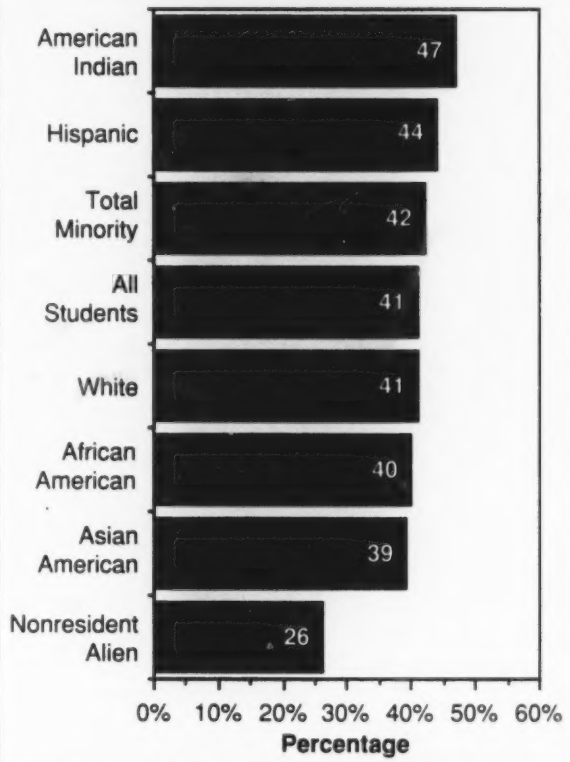
— 40 percent of African American students;

— 39 percent of Asian American students; and

— 26 percent of nonresident alien students.

Figure 3

Percentage of Undergraduates Attending Part Time, 1990



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990, unpublished data tabulations, 1992.

- However, there were moderate gender gaps in part-time attendance among most groups:
  - —49 percent of American Indian women attended part time, compared with 43 percent of American Indian men;
  - —the same share (44 percent) of Hispanic men and women were part-time students;
  - —45 percent of white women enrolled part time, yet only 37 percent of white men did;
  - —42 percent of African American men and 37 percent of African American women attended part time;
  - —similar proportions of Asian American men and women were part-time students (41 percent and 38 percent, respectively); and
  - —30 percent of nonresident men and 23 percent of nonresident women were part-time students.
- In all groups, students were slightly more likely to attend part time in 1990 than they were in 1980. The proportion of part-time students increased by 4 to 9 percent for all groups, with the exception of American Indians, who experienced a small decrease (table 1).

INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

Part-time students are most likely to attend public, two-year institutions:

- In 1990, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of students in public two-year colleges were enrolled part time. In comparison, part-time students represented:
  - —25 percent of students at public four-year institutions;
  - —25 percent of students at independent two-year colleges; and
  - —23 percent of students at independent four-year institutions.
- These proportions have remained relatively stable since 1980.

Part-time vs. Full-time Students

As a group, part-time students differed from full-time students on a number of variables (figure 4).

- Almost three-fifths (59 percent) of part-time students are women, compared with 52 percent of full-time students.
- In addition, white women account for almost half (46 percent) of all part-time students, yet they comprise only 40 percent of full-time students.
- Overall, the part-time and full-time student populations have the same relative proportion of minority students (21 percent).
- Among part-time students, there is a slightly lower proportion of nonresident aliens. While 1 percent of all part-time students are foreign students, more than 2 percent of full-time students are foreign.

Also, part-time students tend to be older than full-time students.

- In 1990, one out of four part-time undergraduates fell in the "traditional" age range of college students (ages 18 to 24), compared with more than half (53 percent) of full-time undergraduates (figure 4).
- While one quarter (27 percent) of part-time students fell between the ages of 25 to 34, only 18 percent of full-time undergraduates did. Similarly, almost one-fifth (19 percent) of part-time students were aged 35 to 49, yet 12 percent of full-time students fell in that age range.

Part-time undergraduates are more likely to be independent of their parents:

Table 1

Undergraduate Enrollment, Full Time vs. Part Time, 1980 and 1990
(in thousands)

	1980			1990			% Change, 1980 to 1990	
	Full Time	Part Time	%Part Time	Full Time	Part Time	%Part Time	Full Time	Part Time
Total	**6,353**	**4,166**	**39%**	**7,053**	**4,932**	**41%**	**11%**	**18%**
Men	3,200	1,791	36%	3,366	2,020	38%	5%	13%
Women	3,154	2,375	43%	3,688	2,912	44%	17%	23%
Minority	**1,127**	**723**	**39%**	**1,485**	**1,057**	**42%**	**32%**	**46%**
Men	510	316	38%	659	438	40%	29%	39%
Women	617	407	40%	827	618	43%	34%	52%
White (non-Hispanic)	**4,989**	**283**	**36%**	**5,401**	**3,815**	**41%**	**8%**	**35%**
Men	2,537	1,226	33%	2,608	1,552	37%	3%	27%
Women	2,451	1,610	40%	2,793	2,263	45%	14%	41%
African American	**621**	**324**	**34%**	**669**	**448**	**40%**	**8%**	**38%**
Men	264	131	33%	275	162	37%	4%	24%
Women	357	193	35%	395	286	42%	10%	48%
Hispanic	**309**	**197**	**39%**	**467**	**371**	**44%**	**51%**	**88%**
Men	144	92	39%	206	164	44%	43%	79%
Women	165	105	39%	261	207	44%	58%	97%
Asian American	**135**	**83**	**38%**	**298**	**193**	**39%**	**121%**	**131%**
Men	72	42	37%	155	95	38%	116%	127%
Women	63	42	40%	143	98	41%	127%	135%
American Indian	**38**	**36**	**49%**	**51**	**44**	**47%**	**32%**	**22%**
Men	18	15	46%	22	17	43%	23%	12%
Women	20	21	51%	28	27	49%	41%	29%
Non-Resident Alien	**163**	**41**	**20%**	**167**	**60**	**26%**	**2%**	**46%**
Men	115	23	16%	99	30	23%	-14%	34%
Women	48	19	28%	68	30	30%	41%	60%

Note: These figures may not match published data from the National Center for Education Statistics, because they include enrollments from outlying areas (territories) and from the U.S. Service Schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS)," unpublished data tabulations, 1980, and "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990, unpublished data tabulations.

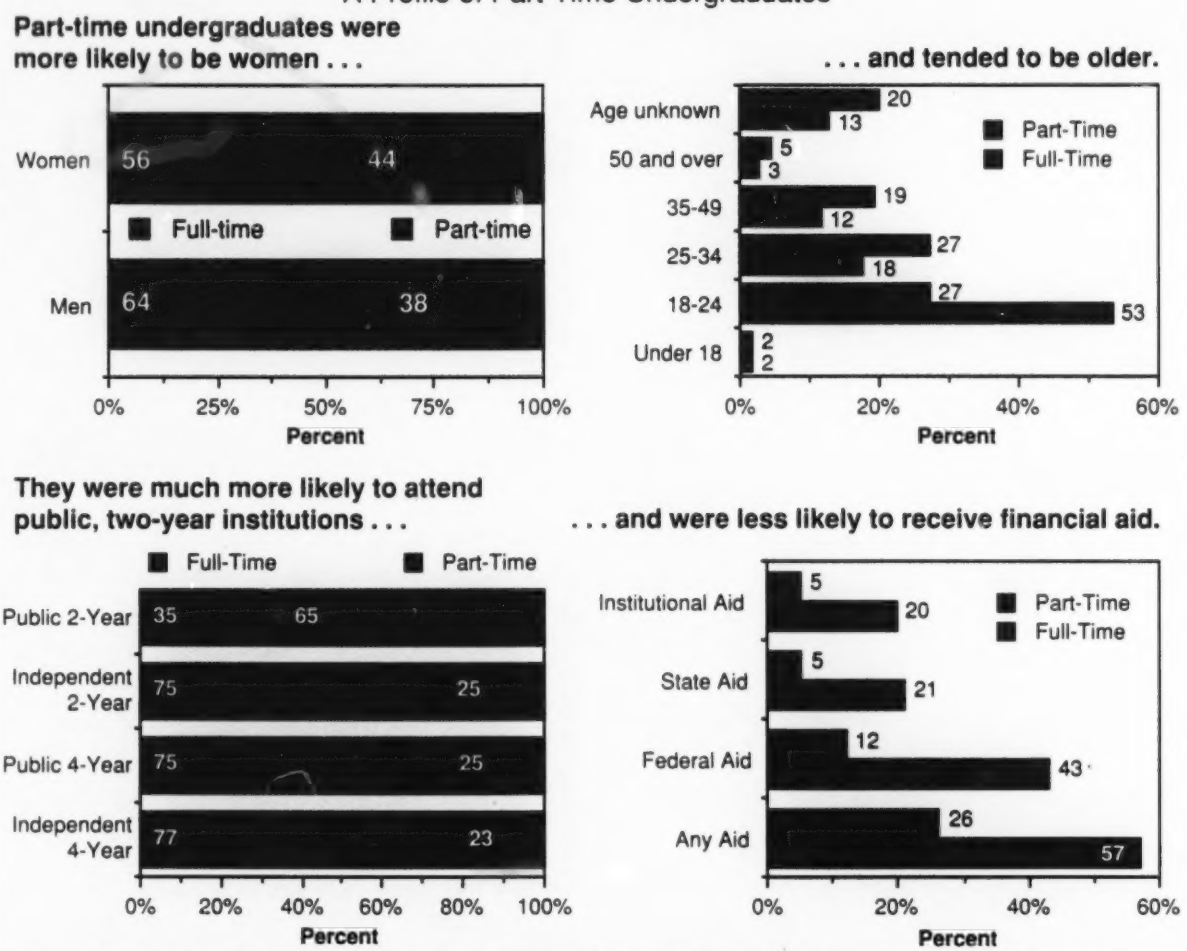
- 65 percent of part-time students are independent, while only 28 percent of full-time students are independent (NPSAS, 1990).[3]
- NPSAS data also show that part-time and full-time students are equally likely to come from low-income families: 42 percent of part-time and full-time undergraduates reported family incomes below $20,000. Yet part-time students are less likely to report higher family incomes — 25 percent of part-time students had family incomes above $40,000, compared with 33 percent of full-time students.
- One analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics' High School and Beyond study found that students who attended part time differed from those attending full time in that they were more likely to come from lower-socioeconomic status backgrounds, more likely to have graduated from a nonacademic track in high school, and less likely to have done well in their test scores and grades (Hearn, 1987).[4]

FINANCIAL AID

Part-time students are much less likely to receive financial aid than their full-time counterparts. This is partially explained by federal restrictions on financial aid, which distinguish between part-time students who attend less than half time and those who attend more than half time (but still less than full time). For instance, students with financial need who are enrolled at least half time are eligible to receive a Pell Grant,[5] and any type of federal loan (Stafford, PLUS, or SLS). However, needy students enrolled less than half time are only eligible for aid from campus-based programs, which include the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), College Work-Study, and Perkins Loan programs.

Figure 4

A Profile of Part-Time Undergraduates



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990 (unpublished data tabulations, 1992), and 1990 *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study* (unpublished data tabulations, 1992).

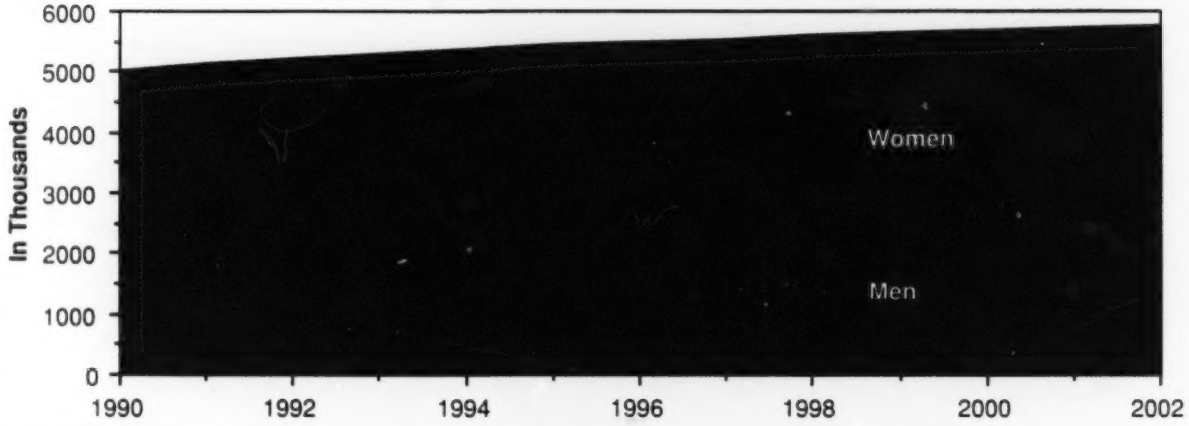
The most comprehensive source for data on student participation in financial aid programs is the NCES' National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, completed most recently in 1990. NPSAS data show that:

- In 1990, only 26 percent of part-time undergraduates received any aid, compared with 57 percent of full-time students.
- Part-time students were also less likely than full-time students to receive institutional funds (5 percent vs. 20 percent).
- Unfortunately, part-time students fared even worse at two-year public colleges, with only 10 percent receiving any aid and 1 percent receiving institutional aid (Ross and Hampton, 1992).
- While federal aid assisted less than 15 percent of all part-time students, almost half of all full-time students received some federal financial aid.
- The gap between part- and full-time students also showed in loans: 30 percent of full-time undergraduates had taken out loans, while only 6 percent of part-time students did (Knapp, 1992). However, students enrolled full time had slightly lower average debts than their part-time counterparts ($2,671 vs. $2,918).

Even though students who attend on a less than half time basis are eligible for the federal campus-based student aid programs, colleges rarely spend allotments on part-time students. These programs

Figure 5

Projected Growth in Undergraduate Part-Time Students, by Gender, 1990 to 2002



Note: Data based on middle alternative projections.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Projections of Education Statistics to 2002.* Washington,D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991.

are funded by the federal government but administered by financial aid administrators at individual institutions.

- For example, NPSAS showed that only 1 percent of part-time students participated in the College Work-Study program, yet 9 percent of full-time students did so.

Because most states require students to carry a full-time load to qualify for aid, most part-time students are not eligible for state aid.

- The 1991-92 survey of the National Association of State Scholarship and Grant Programs (NASSGP) found that part-time undergraduates account for only 5 percent of the undergraduate recipients who are awarded need-based scholarships and grants, and they receive only 3 percent of all need-based funds awarded to undergraduates (NASSGP, 1992).[6]
- NPSAS data showed that only 5 percent of part-time undergraduates were awarded state aid; yet 21 percent of full-time students were.

NPSAS also showed dependent students were more likely to receive grants, and less likely to take out loans, regardless of whether they attended part time or full time in 1990:

- Almost three-fifths of part-time and full-time dependent undergraduates received grants, compared with half of part-time and full-time independent students (Noell, 1992).
- About three of every ten part-time or full-time dependent students took out loans, in contrast with four of every ten part-time or full-time independent undergraduates (Noell, 1992).

A Look to the Future

The number of part-time students is projected to continue to increase into the early 21st century, according to NCES (1991). The proportion of part-time students is also projected to increase slightly during the 1990s, but then it is projected to level off in the first years of the next century.

- By 1995, the number of part-time undergraduates is projected to reach 5.4 million, accounting for 44 percent of all students.
  - —This would represent an 8 percent increase from almost 5 million students enrolled part time in 1990.
- By the year 2002, projections indicate that 42 percent, or 5.7 million, of the 13.7 million undergraduates will attend part time.

NCES projections estimate that much of the growth will come from gains made by women (figure 5).

- For women, the number of part-time undergraduates is projected to rise to 3.2 million in 1995, up 9 percent from 2.9 million in 1990.
- By 2002, almost 3.5 million women undergraduates are projected to enroll part time, representing a 17 percent jump from 1990.
- The number of male undergraduates enrolled part time is projected to grow 7 percent between 1990 and 1995, from 2 million to almost 2.2 million.
- By 2002, the number of men projected to attend part time will reach almost 2.3 million, an 11 percent increase from 1990.

Part-Time Students at Public Two-Year Colleges

The majority of part-time students are enrolled in public two-year colleges—3.2 million of the total 4.9 million part-time undergraduates attend community and junior colleges. Trends during the 1980s solidified this concentration: four of every five new part-time students enrolled in public two-year colleges.

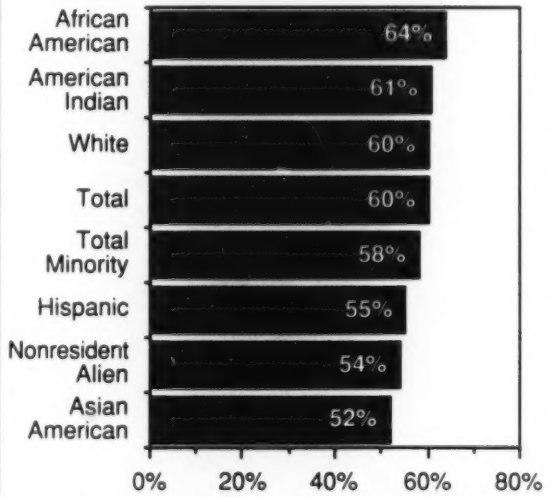
- From 1980 to 1990, the number of students enrolled part-time at public two-year colleges rose 25 percent, from 2.6 million to 3.2 million (table 2). This compares with a 12 percent rise in full-time enrollment.
- Part-time students now represent almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the 4.9 million students at two-year colleges.

During the 1980s, minority and women students accounted for an increasing portion of the part-time student population at two-year colleges.

- From 1980 to 1990, the number of women enrolled part time at two-year colleges rose 29 percent from 1.5 million to 1.9 million.
- Among all racial/ethnic groups, women represent a majority of part-time community college students (figure 6).

Figure 6

Percentage of Part-Time Community College Students Who are Women, 1990



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990, unpublished data tabulations.

- During the 1980s, African American part-time students at two-year colleges increased by almost 100,000, with the proportion of African American students attending part time growing from 52 percent to 62 percent.
- For Hispanic students, the number attending part-time at community and junior colleges more than doubled — from 123,000 to 266,000.
- The number of Asian American students enrolled part time at public two-year colleges almost tripled from 50,000 in 1980 to 139,000 in 1990.
- American Indians — already highly concentrated among part-time students at two-year colleges (65 percent in 1980) — recorded a 21 percent gain between 1980 and 1990, from 27,000 to 32,000.

Students at two-year colleges are more likely to work than students at four-year institutions:

- In 1991, the Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that 70 percent of college freshmen at two-year colleges were in the labor force, compared with one-third (33 percent) of freshmen at four-year colleges (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992).

Some research indicates that students who attend two-year institutions on a part-time basis have different educational goals than full-time students — they may be more oriented toward gaining job skills or career training than in working toward a degree.

- A survey of Michigan's community college students found that about half (51 percent) of full-time students said they attended to earn "university transfer credit," while only one-third (33 percent) of part-time students gave that reason (Michigan State Board of Education, 1991).
- Yet 23 percent of part-time students said the "improvement of existing job skills" was their primary goal, while only 7 percent of full-time students cited this as their main goal.
- In addition, only 19 percent of part-time students planned on transferring to a four-year college or university, yet 34 percent of full-time students did. Part-time students were also somewhat less likely to plan on getting an associate's degree (51 percent) than were full-time students (58 percent).

Another study of community college students found that those students who are baccalaureate/transfer students are more likely to attend

Table 2

Part-Time Enrollments at Public, Two-Year Colleges, 1980 and 1990
(in thousands)

	1980		1990		
	Part-Time	% of Total	Part Time	% of Total	Percent Change
Total	**2,588**	**100%**	**3,235**	**100%**	**25%**
Men	1,092	42%	1,299	40%	19%
Women	1,496	58%	1,936	60%	29%
Minority	**473**	**18%**	**727**	**22%**	**54%**
Men	209	8%	303	9%	45%
Women	264	10%	424	13%	61%
White (non-Hispanic)	**2,092**	**81%**	**2,473**	**76%**	**18%**
Men	871	34%	980	30%	13%
Women	1,221	47%	1,493	46%	22%
African American	**191**	**7%**	**289**	**11%**	**51%**
Men	78	3%	104	3%	33%
Women	112	4%	185	6%	65%
Hispanic	**123**	**5%**	**266**	**8%**	**116%**
Men	58	2%	119	4%	105%
Women	65	3%	147	5%	126%
Asian American	**50**	**2%**	**139**	**4%**	**178%**
Men	25	1%	67	2%	168%
Women	25	2%	72	3%	188%
American Indian	**27**	**1%**	**33**	**1%**	**22%**
Men	11	0.4%	13	0.4%	18%
Women	16	0.6%	20	0.6%	25%
Non-Resident Alien	**18**	**1%**	**35**	**1%**	**94%**
Men	9	0.3%	16	0.5%	78%
Women	9	0.3%	19	0.6%	111%

Note: These figures may not match published data from the National Center for Education Statistics, because they include enrollments from outlying areas (territories) and from the U.S. Service Schools. Also, details may not add to totals due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS)," unpublished data tabulations, 1980, and "Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)," Fall Enrollment Survey, 1990, unpublished data tabulations.

full time than those students who are in occupational/career or vocational skills programs.

- Almost two out of five (39 percent) of general associate and baccalaureate/transfer students were full time, compared with 10 percent of students in vocational skills programs and 28 percent of occupational/career program students (Illinois Community College Board, 1991).

Several transcript analyses of community college graduates have found mean times to associate degree completion to range from 4.3 years to 5.8 years (Dillon, 1990; City Colleges of Chicago, 1990). These reports, focused on large community college districts, hypothesized that the longer than expected completion rates were largely due to high part-time attendance and frequent "stop outs" (students who leave college but return later).

- One survey indicated that persistence may be lower among part-time community college students. When asked if they planned on enrolling again next semester, 78 percent of full-time students said they did, compared with only 65 percent of part-time students (Michigan State Board of Education, 1991).
- In one transcript study, the average semester load for all students was 9.7 units (based on a 15 unit full-time level). Only five percent took 15 units or more per semester, and 10 percent averaged fewer than 5 units per semester (Dillon, 1990). With these course-taking levels, it would be difficult for students to complete an associate's degree in less than three years.

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IMPLICATIONS

The increase in the number and proportion of part-time students dispels the myth of the "traditional" undergraduate student—that is, the notion that most college students fall between the ages of 18 and 24, enroll full-time immediately after graduating from high school, and are supported by their parents. Recognizing the enormous growth in the part-time student population, colleges and universities should consider how the needs of part-time students differ from those of full-time students. For instance, part-time students are concerned about general student services issues such as parking, campus safety, child care, and the availability of courses during weeknights and weekends, etc., while full-time students may be more interested in student associations, extracurricular offerings, and residence hall issues.

Also, more research in general is needed on the experience of part-time students in undergraduate programs. There is one especially troublesome research area on part-time students: persistence and degree completion rates for part-time students are virtually impossible to determine. Some regional and institutional studies have shown that even at community colleges, students are not finishing in two years.

The interaction between part-time attendance status and degree completion needs to be studied. Such research could also have important implications for the financial aid system. For instance, it might show that the expected length of financial aid coverage may not be accurate or appropriate for part-time students. Unfortunately, even the data collection efforts mandated by the federal "Student Right to Know Act" will not fill this research void, since colleges and universities are not required to gather information on part-time students.

The increase in the part-time student population has important implications for financial aid. Some analysts point to the fact that the current federal financial aid system was developed for the traditional student — meaning a full-time, dependent student falling between the ages of 18 and 24 — and note how problematic this system is for part-time students. Under this system, the very definition of "need" is somewhat inappropriate for part-time and adult students (Ross and Hampton, 1992).

Nevertheless, part-time students may have even greater need for financial assistance than their full-time counterparts because of different costs they face. In addition to tuition, fees, and books, part-time students — especially adult students — may have higher household expenses, child care costs, as well as the need to make up for lost wages. Data that shows part-time students have higher average debts than their full-time counterparts might be interpreted as evidence of this cost differential. Part-time students may also be limited in terms of financial aid, because of their high concentration in two-year colleges, which typically provide few students with institutional aid.

The lack of financial aid for part-time students is particularly distressing at the state level. Although part-time students account for 41 percent of all undergraduates, they receive only 3 percent of all need-based state aid. In other words, two-fifths of our nation's students receive 3 percent of state aid to needy students, while the other three-fifths receive the other 97 percent.

With more than half of all students and two-thirds of part-time students working while attending college, employers may be a more fruitful source of financial aid. As Arthur Hauptman suggests in *Financing Nontraditional Students*, "Individuals in the labor force should have greater access to a number of financing approaches that would vary by the type of education and training being provided and the employment situation of the individual. For example: Employers should be encouraged to provide more assistance to full-time employees who take a course or two (i.e., less-than-half-time students) through either a federal matching program or low-interest loans for the employers who provide such benefits" (Hauptman, 1992).

The growth in the number of students attending part time raises many other important questions for higher education institutions: Does the large number of students who work and attend college part time indicate that a college education is moving farther out of reach for many Americans? Why has the number of women and minority students enrolling part time increased? For those who want an associate and a bachelor's degree, what mechanisms can be developed to assist their degree completion? Given the recent policy discussions about linking financial aid and community service, how will part-time students juggle these competing demands? Colleges and universities need to address these and other questions, recognizing that this important student population will continue to grow.

ENDNOTES

1. While Ross and Hampton state that the number of part-time students is greatly underestimated by "snapshot" enrollment surveys, such as NCES' fall enrollment survey, they estimate that the overall proportion of part-time students to full-time students remains the same. Their calculations match the NCES data, which show that 42 percent of all students attend part time.
2. However, the age of 20 percent of the students was unknown.
3. The National Center for Education Statistics defines independent students as students who are 24 years of age or older; veterans of the armed forces; graduate students not claimed as dependents by parents; students who are married, have dependents, or meet other specific criteria.
4. In this study, part-time attendance was defined as pursuing a courseload below half-time.
5. In actuality, less-than-half-time students have been eligible to receive Pell Grants, but Congress has not appropriated funds for these students to receive the grants.
6. Unfortunately, NASSGP does not collect data on non-need based aid to part-time students.

RESOURCES

1) The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a branch of the U.S. Department of Education, is the primary source of national data on part-time students. The two main areas covered include:

Enrollment — The Center's annual *Digest of Education Statistics* provides basic data on part-time undergraduate enrollment, including breakdowns by gender, control of institution, age, field of study, etc., along with comparable data on part-time graduate and professional students. In addition, NCES collects data on part-time students by race/ethnicity and institution type as part of its annual fall enrollment surveys. For more information, contact the National Center for Education Statistics, Education Information Branch, (800) 424-1616. To order the *Digest*, contact the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, (202) 275-3054.

Financial Aid — The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), conducted most recently in 1990, collects data on student financial aid for undergraduate, graduate and professional students, surveying both aided and non-aided students. NPSAS supplies information on students' enrollment characteristics, financial aid status, student costs of attendance, and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. For more information, contact the Postsecondary Education Statistics Division, Longitudinal Studies Branch at (202) 219-1448.

2) The National University Continuing Education Association represents more than 400 colleges and universities that are highly involved in extension and continuing education activities, and as such is considered an important voice for part-time and adult student issues. NUCEA also collects, analyzes and disseminates data on part-time and continuing education students. For more information, contact the National University Continuing Education Association, Suite 615, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 659-3130.

3) The United States Student Association (USSA) represents student bodies at American colleges and universities, providing a strong voice for student issues before the U.S. Department of Education and Congress. USSA has organized students around many issues of importance to part-time students, most noticeably sponsoring and mobilizing a Coalition for Low Tuition. In addition, their Nontraditional Students Caucus focuses on issues important to part-time students. For more information, contact Pronita Gupta, Legislative Director, United States Student Association, 815 15th St. NW, Suite 838, Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 347-8772.

4) The National Association of Returning Students is a very new organization that focuses on issues facing adult students. For more information, contact the National Association of Returning Students, P.O. Box 3283, Salem, OR 97302, (503) 581-3731.

5) The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, while obviously aimed at post-baccalaureate students, also examines part-time student issues. For more information, contact the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, 825 Green Bay Road, Suite 270, Wilmette, IL 60091, (708) 256-1562.

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